Programme specifications and module maps

Undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses

These notes should be used in conjunction with the appropriate QAA Subject Benchmark Statement and The QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Programme Specifications

When designing a new course, the information contained in programme specifications is included on the new forms. There is therefore no need to submit a separate programme specification for most new courses. A programme specification may still be requested (for example by a professional body or for validation events). A module map is still required.

- Programme specification and module map templates

Section A

Provides standard details of the course; awarding body/institution; teaching institution; accreditation details (where appropriate); final award; course title; UCAS code; relevant QAA benchmark group(s); admissions criteria; and publication/revision date.

Course titles

Adding a placement year, year abroad or foundation year to an existing three-year course

Where there are opportunities for students to add a placement year, year abroad or foundation year to their course, the course title should be the same as the three-year version, with the addition of the following to the title as appropriate:

- (including placement year)
- (including year abroad)
- (including foundation year)

This is only the case where these versions of the course are identical to the three-year version in every other respect. This helps to make the connection between the three-year and four-year versions clear, and links to progression decisions that are possible under the Rules of Assessment.

Course aims and outcomes should reflect these elements of the course in comparison with the three-year version.

Courses with a core placement year or year abroad

Where a placement year or year abroad is a core requirement of the course, and it is not possible to take or pass the course as a three-year version without a placement or year abroad, the course title should not include the same additional wording described above.
Section B

Provides a concise overview of the curriculum provision in the course, identifying the course aims, the course learning outcomes and the corresponding methods of learning, teaching and assessment.

Course aims and outcomes must be suitable for the course and must relate to the benchmark statements, the National Qualification Frameworks and, where appropriate, to the requirements of any professional bodies.

Organisational Development can also provide guidance on writing learning outcomes at programme and module level.

Departments should ensure students and all teaching staff are made aware of the aims and learning outcomes. Students should also be made aware of how to access the full programme specification, such as through reference in student handbooks and links from departmental web resources.

What is meant by the course aim?

Course aims are intended to provide a clear understanding of the course’s teaching intentions. For the programme specifications, this should be a brief statement of what the course intends to deliver, identifying the core concepts and any rationale.

What is meant by course learning outcomes?

These are statements of what the student will reasonably be expected to know, understand or be able to do on completion of the particular course of study.

When drafting the course outcomes, departments should be aware that learning outcomes must operate at threshold level (i.e. the minimum standard needed to obtain third class honours) but that consideration should also be given to how students can demonstrate achievement beyond the threshold.

For the programme specification, the course learning outcomes are divided into four categories:

- knowledge and understanding
- practical skills
- cognitive skills
- key skills

Within the programme specification database, each learning outcome will be numbered in accordance with the section to which it relates, e.g. outcomes in the section headed knowledge and understanding will be numbered A1, A2 and so on. The system will automatically allocate a number to each learning outcome, but this may be overridden where appropriate, e.g. where a learning outcome is shared by a related group of degree courses.

When completing the section on key skills, departments will be required to input text against the six categories of key skills used at Essex: communication; numeracy; IT; working with others; problem solving; improving own learning and performance. The key skills will be numbered D1 to D6 though departments may list a number of points against each heading. There is no requirement to input outcomes against each key skill since it would be inappropriate or impossible to do so in many cases. However, where no text is inputted against one of the key skill headings, the key skill will not appear in the programme specification.

What relationship needs to be specified between the learning outcome and methods of learning, teaching and assessment?

The programme specification must identify a clear link between the learning outcome and the method of learning, teaching and assessment which enables the students to achieve that outcome.

Learning and teaching methods/strategies can refer to the type of learning environment, such as lectures, small group classes, laboratory classes and workshops. They can also refer to the type of activities within these classes such as group discussions, case study analysis, presentations, practicals and so on.

When specifying the assessment methods for the learning outcomes, departments can identify a general form of assessment, such as examinations or continuous coursework, but can also provide more detail by identifying the type of assessment such as essays, presentations, group reports, and assessed practicals.

When mapping the assessment method to the learning outcomes, departments should consider appropriate grading criteria to enable staff to identify achievement of each learning outcome beyond threshold level.
Section C
Set out the course structure listing all modules and their status.

Section D
Specifies the Rules of Assessment. This will be a simple weblink to the University’s Rules of Assessment and will normally be completed centrally by the Academic Section.

Requests for variations to the Rules of Assessment require approval (please contact your Quality and Academic Development Manager for advice).

Annex – module map
Departments should be able to demonstrate how the course learning outcomes are reflected in the course content.

The module map shows how individual modules map against the course-level learning outcomes. Departments should check that the learning outcomes will be covered wherever students pass the course, taking care where it’s possible for a student to fail modules and pass their course (see the Rules of Assessment information on condonement).

Departments can use the template module map as it stands or adapt it to provide a more extensive summary.

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